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sustainable development

SECURITY COUNCIL
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Letter dated 4 June 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward, enclosed herewith, a letter from Jagos Zelenovic, Federal Minister for Development, Science and Environment, addressed to Klaus Toepler, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, relative to the consequences of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization aggression on the environment in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council, under item 13 (a) of the provisional agenda of its 1999 regular session, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vladislav JOVANOVIC
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* E/1999/100 and Add.1.

Annex

Letter from the Federal Minister for Development, Science and Environment addressed to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

I would like to remind you of the letter dated 18 April 1999, addressed to you by Zivadin Jovanovic, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and on this occasion I wish once again to alert you and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development to the environmental consequences inflicted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Since 24 March 1999, NATO has been severely bombing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, without any international legal basis, real pretext and consensus of the United Nations Security Council.

The NATO aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has caused an economic, humanitarian, health as well as environmental catastrophe.

The aggressor's daily targets are national parks, nature reservations, monuments of cultural and natural heritage, rare and protected plants and animal species, among which are those of international importance. Even the cultural and historical monuments, which are in the World Heritage List, are not being spared, as well as the world biosphere reservation and wetlands of international importance.

Besides carrying out genocide, NATO by its aggression is causing ecocide in the environment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and wider, in the whole Balkans and a considerable part of Europe. The real ecological catastrophe is going on in the heart of Europe with unforeseeable time and space range.

With daily attacks on the chemical industry and electrical power plants, the NATO forces have caused numerous technological, chemical and industrial accidents throughout Yugoslavia, with wide local consequences and will all elements of transboundary environmental catastrophe. Permanent bombing has caused numerous explosions, swift uncontrolled spreading, spilling, evaporating and sublimating of huge quantities of highly toxic substances, as well as burning, combustion and incomplete combustion of inflammable materials. Large quantities of substances with carcinogenic, allergenic, teratogenic, mutagenic, toxic and other dangerous characteristics with negative consequences for people, plants and animals have been emitted into the environment.

Destruction of chemical industry plants presents a special form of chemical war. In order to illustrate this, a few typical examples are given below:

(a) Large quantities of dangerous and harmful substances have been dispersed: chlorine, chloro-carbon hydride, ammonia, benzene and vinyl-chloride, with the concentration in the air in some places reaching values of several hundred and more than a few thousand times higher than the allowed maximum;

(b) Incomplete combustion of inflammable fuel has caused the emission of a huge quantity of carbon-monoxide, nitrogen and sulphur oxides, carcinogenic polycyclic carbon-hydride and soot;

(c) There is a danger that bombing of the chemical industry plants could cause spillage of highly toxic mercury, which is used in certain technological processes;

(d) Thousands of tons of oil and oil derivatives, acids and alkalis have leaked into the rivers, effecting and, in some locations, destroying aquatic flora and fauna;

(e) Thousands of tons of oil have leaked into the Danube, the most important European river, thus destroying and endangering in the long term flora and fauna, as well as the water supply for large numbers of people in several countries;

(f) Heavily damaged electric power transformer stations released pyralene oils - only one litre of spilt oil can pollute one billion litres of water;

(g) Certain quantities of heavy metals were also spread into some water flows.

Chemical compound emissions following bomb and missile explosions are extremely dangerous, as well as fires resulting from building destruction, including surrounding forest, all being important ecosystem components. Bearing in mind that the NATO aggressor uses the banned cluster bombs, the endangered areas cover a vast region.

Many forest complexes, national parks and orchards were damaged by bombing, by cluster bombs in particular. Large forest areas were damaged in the fire, trunks were damaged and destroyed, thus devastating forests and contaminating the forest soil. Owing to fossil fuel combustion a great quantity of harmful gases were emitted in the air with adverse influence on forest death.

NATO uses in its aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia banned genocide weapons, ammunition with radioactive charges. It has been proved that A10 warplanes use ammunition with depleted uranium. Uranium oxide particles with micro dimension and in the form of mobile aerosol are spread widely by air circulation. The depleted uranium has a semi-disintegration time of several hundred million years; actually its effect is everlasting. If it is inhaled, this radioactive and highly toxic material cannot be removed from lungs, thus enlarging its toxic and carcinogenic effects.

Vast distraction was caused by soft graphite bombs several times breaking down the electric power system with unforeseeable humanitarian and environmental consequences.

The NATO aggression on Yugoslavia contains essential elements of ecocide. Numerous specially valuable habitats of flora and fauna and vulnerable ecosystems were polluted and/or degraded by dangerous eco-toxic materials. Fresh water flows and underground waters have been polluted, and the air

pollution has endangered a vast area, causing long-term soil pollution and endangering agricultural and forest areas, leading to an unforeseeable endangering of biodiversity. Destroyed bridges slow down the water flow and flood up-stream regions. A slow-down of the Danube flow at Novi Sad has already caused flooding of cultivated land, and there is a threat of flooding of settlements.

Regarding the NATO threats of bombing of oil and chemical industry plants, which could be considered as "chemical bombs", and bearing in mind danger to the environment at local and transboundary level, preventive security measures have been undertaken (evacuation, dislocation etc.).

NATO is constantly carrying out war activities in the vicinity of the Institute of Nuclear Sciences Vinca in the Belgrade suburbs. The Institute performs only scientific and research activities related to peaceful conditions. If the international community does not prevent these attacks, an environmental crime will happen with unforeseeable consequences. Man's right to safe and healthy environment is endangered by the NATO aggression. As a result of this, numerous basic human rights are violated, including the right to life and health, as well as other basic human rights and freedom (the right to development, work, education, movement, freedom of thought etc.).

Numerous international documents have been severely violated by the unprovoked and illegal NATO aggression: the Charter of the United Nations, the humanitarian law provisions, especially the Geneva Conventions with the related protocols, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, provisions of international agreement in the field of the environment, as well as the basic proclaimed principles of environmental protection.

Within the framework of the violated international agreements in the field of the environment, particular attention is drawn to the following conventions: the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, the Convention on the Transboundary Pollution of the Atmosphere, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

The following conventions related to environmental protection during the war conflicts have been violated: the Convention on the Banning of Military or any other Adverse Technology Affecting the Environment, the Convention on Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Case of War Conflicts, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, etc.

The member States of NATO have also violated the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and in particular principle 24: "Warfare is inherently destructive to sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development as necessary", as well as principle 25: "Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible".

Bearing in mind the above, and respecting the consistent peace policy carried out by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, we consider it is imperative to immediately cease all war activities and seek a peaceful solution to the existing problems and to start rehabilitation and reconstruction as soon as possible.

(Signed) Jagos ZELENOVIC
Minister in the Federal Government